

TRAIL DESCRIPTIONS

Marsh Trail

Cool winding boardwalk trail meanders over and along the stream under a canopy of Fremont cottonwoods, red willows, and an occasional white alder. Marshes along the way support dwarf willow, mule fat, goldenrods, cattail, bulrush, yerba mansa, water parsnip and watercress. This trail is a birder's paradise during the spring and fall migration of neotropical birds, and supports the second highest density of breeding birds known in the United States. Annual surveys document that 1400 pairs of breeding birds per square kilometer nest here.

This boardwalk is made of recycled plastic milk containers mixed with sawdust. This environmentally appropriate building material lasts longer than ordinary lumber and is non-polluting.

Desert Willow Trail

Nice walk but little shade along most of the trail. Can be hot in midday and summer. Benches are tucked in shady spots. Dirt trail winds through open fields of fall-blooming alkali goldenbush along the edge of mesquite thickets, then drops into a desert wash habitat with willow-like desert catalpas, evergreen yerba santa and wild tarragon. At the overlook, glimpse into the wetlands below and the lush cottonwood-willow woodland that hides the year-round stream. This ecotone between riparian woodland and desert wash habitats is excellent for birding. Continue your walk by choosing the shady Marsh Trail, or climb the Yucca Ridge Trail to get panoramic views of the valley, canyon and mountains.

Yucca Ridge Trail

Spectacular bird's-eye view of the preserve's woodland and wetland areas, Morongo Valley, snow-capped San Geronio and San Jacinto Peaks and lower Big Morongo Canyon. Walk through desert scrub vegetation including creosote bush, Mojave yucca, ephedra, several species of cacti, and even club moss clinging to cooler rock surfaces. View white dikes of feldspar intruding into ancient gneiss outcrops that are over one billion years old, one of the oldest exposed rock formations in California. This trail enters woodland habitat at the lower end of the Mesquite Trail and joins desert wash habitat along the Desert Willow Trail.

Barn Trail

Stroll through an open grassy field which crosses a moist drainage frequented by birds. In the span of only 5 minutes, nine species of flycatchers have been seen on this trail in spring. The path leads to an old barn built in the 1920's ranching era.

Mesquite Trail

Enchanting streamside walk under the canopy of Fremont cottonwoods and red willows. Boardwalks and bridges lead you along the stream's marsh habitat supporting cattails, bulrushes, wirerushes, watercress and yerba mansa. The cool shady tunnel through honey mesquite is covered overhead by vines of virgin's bower. Skirt the foot of a desert mountain where scrub oaks, Mojave yucca, cacti, and lichen-painted boulders hug the drier slopes above.

Canyon Trail

Experience a gradual descent from the higher, cooler Mojave Desert habitat down the canyon to the lower, warmer Colorado Desert climate. This trail is a favorite of many local hikers. They often leave one vehicle at the parking lot, and another at the lower end of the canyon. Park at the fenced pipeline facility several yards north of Indian Avenue on the dirt road approximately 1/2 mile east of Hwy. 62. Most of the way you follow a willow-lined stream, staying in the canyon bottom below steep-sided rocky canyon walls.

Be sure to take Water!